Free fresco Academy

Making a jewel shine out of Harkov's historic rubble urbanism

Har'kov, 7th June 2013

We propose to Combine the constructivist and pre-industrial painting heritage to a new quality of mural space in downtown Har'kovs railroad and waterside district

Free Fresco Academy sets out to refurbishing the integral facades of the objects ul. Gamarnika 11 and 13 (Har'kov) in a scenographic vision of conscious urbanism with the means of sophisticated mural techniques (fresco and mosaic)

An international group of mural artists integrated by free fresco academy has studied the possibilities of initiating a more careful and conscious approach to social urban aesthetics in the town of Har'kov by creating a model case on the objects ul. Gamarnika 11 and 13.

The original substance of the building complex is highly scattered. Building conservation, urbanistic environment and the conscious planning of public space to access and organise the use of the objects offers just fragments and residuals of former intentions and planning. Putting these fragments together cannot be a mere work of gluing and making the many missing links less noticeable. The complex needs an entirely new formula, creating a new social and urbanistic entity all the while taking heed of the valuable substance still present at the site both in traditional building techniques and materials as well as the urbanistic qualities once achieved by them in their former contexts.

The street front of ul. Gamarnika has been fragmented with just the 7 times 7 meters front facade of Gamarnika 11 meant as a street view at the time it was being designed and constructed around the beginning of the 20th century. A further aesthetic effort to integrate urban functionality and social recognition value can be observed for back yard situations both to the left of the façade and to a lesser and more deteriorated degree to its right.
These back yard situations with their historicising embellishments in dissolution have now become part of a new and characteristically unintended complexity of façade cubature. This chaotic situationism of functional decay and rubble aesthetics is comically underlined by the placing of 4 trees in the back yard contexts (three right, one left) and an element of planned urban gardening for the right back-yard, now pretending to form part of the street public sidewalk space or even creating some pretentions of an orthogonal axis on random rubble of a former neighbouring property.
This lack of architectuaral an urbanistic consistency and the recent efforts of masking and unifying it further under banners facilitating unhalted decay underneath creates the impression of petty rubble, scanty-town improvisation and intentional social disenfranchising of people having to use these neglected public spaces for their daily life.

Free Fresco Academy sees the chance of revaluating the ensemble of number 11 and 13 as a kind of show case for a more careful and sophisticated urban redevelopment in the heritage centre of Har'kov. Such refurbishing preserves and valuates the social housing function of the present objects: it is not apt to be misused for facilitating gentrification or the new artificial sterility of use now common to commercial refurbishing of Har'kov's historic centre. Community painting and its communal planning practice offer the chance to communicate

with present users of the objects in a horizontal and interactive process of understanding needs and sharing knowledge.

We propose to the present users a mix of two strategies for recreating special unity and a precious profile it once had about a hundred years ago, though its dimensions, of course remain modest and secondary in its environment of palaces and mansions leading from the river to the railroad communication knot. We are committed to take up the communicational and cosmopolite urban functions of the railroad quarters with a functionalist design of constructivist inspiration. This first component features mosaic interventions on the historicist façade and back-yard fronts to recreate unity on a different level of abstraction. We show where the entrance is, the hot-spot of the bee-hive these objects are for its lifetime users. We aestheticise and reflect the functionality of road signs all along the road to illustrate and underline the functionality of the building at its side. The practical formalism of this more typographically inspired aesthetical intervention is then balanced and reflected in a completely different mode of expression. We insert rhapsodic intervals of tonal painting so characteristically supported by true fresco in genuinely hydrated lime surfaces carbonising gently and under transparent pigment covers. These more melodious parts will interact with the random botanical assets which have been allowed to develop around the objects during the last 40 years. They will remind of other urban features not subject to functional streamlining like the nearby waterfront, its sea surfaces, the townscape of faces, characters, working histories present through the users of this part of the town. Constructivist elements in mosaic technique and Watteau-like fresco homages to the pre-industrial basis on which Har'kov has been built will meet and merge on the façade. They will create the power and dynamics which – in their freshness – has made the town the one and foremost economic power house of today's territory of Ukraine. Industrial dynamics, industrial transformations and the manifold human arrangements to cope with its impact and use its civilising potentials will be present in a synthesis of mosaic and fresco equally avant-garde and novel to the town of Har'kov as it was and will be to its European and global urban counterparts.

Our show case will highlight a modest and somehow dwarfed urbanistic relic just in the focus of a most strategic site in continental context: our realisation lies within just some hundred meters to both the central railway knot connecting Paris and Vladivostok (there is a direct train over 10.000 km from Vladivostok to Har'kov even 22 years after the demise of soviet integration of the territory) on the one hand and the waterways which were so paramount to proto-industrial developments that pre-figured the fulminant industrial boom the historic buildings no. 11 and 13 are a living testimony of.

We will create added value for sustainable and equitable cultural tourism in the town of Har'kov. We will set new standards for top-edge refurbishments. Coming from Western Europe as artists and community activists we will be able to make an impact on the understanding of "Euro-Remonty", used and abused in contemporary Russian/Ukrainian to mystify and commodity something following a mannerist image of "European Union standards in refurbishing" which are up to now just a caricature of what new building techniques and techniques of social participation and democratisation can really achieve for such a multi-layered and historically rich environment as Har'kov's railroad district. We will thrust the objects far ahead of their surrounding palaces, now being restored with much higher budgets and in view of gentrifying usage and access. We will transform the random openness provoked up to now by mere by rubble urbanistics to show-stage a real social and aesthetically inviting openness promoting to respect and value the intimate qualities of the back-yard streetscapes and its users' individuality. We will create value which has enough substance to allow for its long-term preservation. We will argue for a higher preservation status of the objects under restauration to prevent further degrading superficial interventions with inadequate building materials. We will create a jewel for the town.

Realisation: 1st July (sharp) – 20th August 2013
Artists involved: an international team of 4 artists integrated by Free Fresco Academy.
Surface under construction: 350 square metres material facilitation: Har'cov city council

Planning variations 1-10

1-7 the Watteau-type muse of frolicking in painting town-scapes

Variation 1
Narrative: the red planet, Mars has its social dynamics, Har'kov is Mars, we came from the railway station, let's travel to Mars, it takes a rocket, here's one others join the flight. Telegraphs run ahead of us translating the news to Mars. Will we meet Aelita? Hop, here are people living, they do not need to go further, their warm and dynamic planet is just here. Here's their door. It's kind of personal, would not knock here if I do not know anybody living here. Let's not be too loud, this place has got its life of its own. Just hark. Let's study it with respect and due distance from the pavement. Planning stage: south façade (right front) and adjacent back yard spaces in 1:100 and 1:31,2.

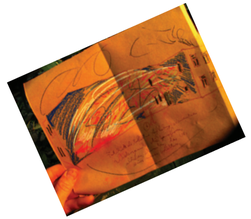
Variation 2
Narrative: where does this walk take us: we have arrived in a mountainous setting. Theere is a hill infront of us, woodlands are interseeded with sparse trees. So these marmotte (susliky) runners are rawing terribly important circles along their trajectory. Let's follow them up in higher regions, there is still some snow though its obviously early summer. Let's not disturb wild-life here. This seems to be a truly fascinating endeavour to follow the circle's megalithic language towads higher spaces on the top of the world.
Planning stage: south façade (right front) and adjacent back yard spaces in 1:100.

Variation 3
Narrative: we entered an icy world long ago, unheeded achievements, there are holes to fall and cracks in the ice, snow is hissed up in glistering winter morning light, users democratise what has been made not for them. Narrative turned over: (1:31,1 planning sheet): industrial dynamics are a hannibal's venture into the icy dangers of the Pyrenees and Alps combined. Will the wandering populous break the power of empire on the other side of the giant ridges? We walk in the shade of Hannibals fighting elephants, or are they Siberian mamuths? We sometimes mistakes Mamuth for ice and elephants for the giant iron machinery which has made Har'kov so powerful and so vulnerable at once. We are not over with it. The wandering quest as just begun. It is a thrilling stage set. We are not mere observers, we are wandering just inside of it. We are the elephant drivers, we are the rubble others want to drive over. We will venture the depth of mural space, we will not freeze as long as company is so numerous and so splendid in its mere wandering intrincic and utterly individual possibilities.
Planning stage: south façade (right front) and adjacent back yard spaces in 1:100 and 1:31,2.

Variation 4
Narrative: what a lucky day we have got: is early spring, every gesture is jest and joking, we are full of ideas. Summer seems just a little eternity away, close enough to touch it already. We are walking. We feel the melody of moving our limbs in spring, we joke. The jokes revibrate cosmically, suddenly they create figures, they arise 5 metres above us just to inflate again to tiny precious little eings, running like rabbits, so intimately aquainted with our jesting mood that we sometimes almost stumble over them. We are the first to break this last ice of spring, we are delving into the dusk of purple's noon transparent might, we are on the way to Australia. We are almost into the gleaming blue of Eucalypt plains. We have made it possible: by leaving our habitual winter demeanour.

Planning stage: south façade (right front) and adjacent back yard spaces in 1:100 and 1:31,2.

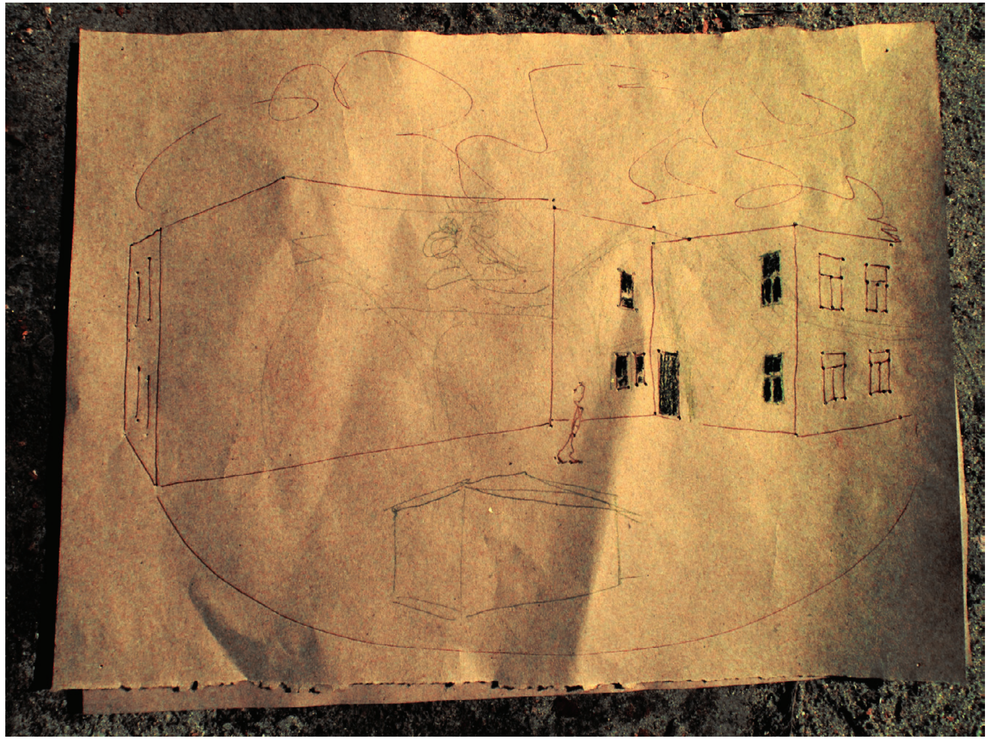
Variation 5
Narrative: on fire. We are amidst a highly intreaging complication. The earth is warming faster than we can understand it. Cities are burning. Fossil fuels are covering our vision and throwing us back on mere survival options. Humanity is not just watching our compication. Fire-fighters have prepared the laddrs to go for full recovery. But water pressure is weak. Some important weights are standing on the pipes. This is not a joke. The fire fighters grasp the dramatic moment. They throw themselves into the battle as bodies in full fire-fighting gear, they are not desperate, they are professionals, they fly to our rescue – can we match their bravery and alivieate their fall. Come and join the teams to hold the human-spun trampolines on the floor beneath the flames. The heroes destined to rescue have become our primordial object of foster and care. They will eventually collide with our inaction. We have to receive them adequately, don't we? So what is to be done. There are instruments to our rescue oin the walls but it is US who has to grasp them and USE them. We are the artists, not the viewers, we are the makers, not the buying folk. We are our destiny and time is running out incredibly fast. Go for it: face the flames!
Planning stage: south façade (right front) and adjacent back yard spaces in 1:100.



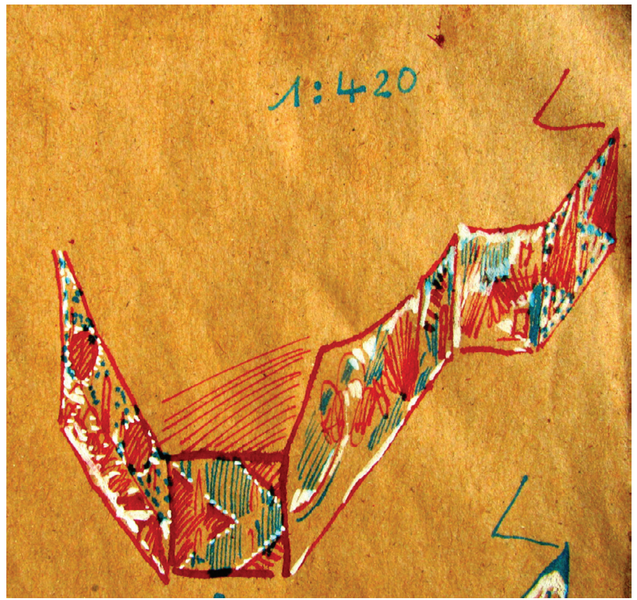
Variation 6
Narrative: So suddenly we understand that progress is not a concern of past agents. It is our destiny. If we engage in conversation, in constructive debate, if we practice a professional taks, and art, a line of reflection to be developed further, we are part of human progress. It's maybe a spiral endeavour. We seem to return to old stages, to dead-ends long ago marked and remembered, cononized and understood, yet over and over we revisit them. Maybe it is a type of revisiting though maybe painful in its throwing us back and back again, yet on a slightly different level than before. Yes we try but foremostly we retry old errors. But hark, maybe old errors endeavoured on a slightly different level encompass entirely new perspective. We are often too small-scale and narrow-minded to understand that the overall progress of human reflection and practice globally is an all-encompassing and instantaneous unifying motion. We just cannot stay back, we can only risk collective falling back which, maybe is being uplifted in a move of common understanding which we could neve3r have achieved in just pursuing simple representations of Cartesian linear progress. We are ready to go on course for much more thrilling experience. We are on it already, understand the great turns and you will be at peace enough to prepare for the successive great surprise and turn in our history.

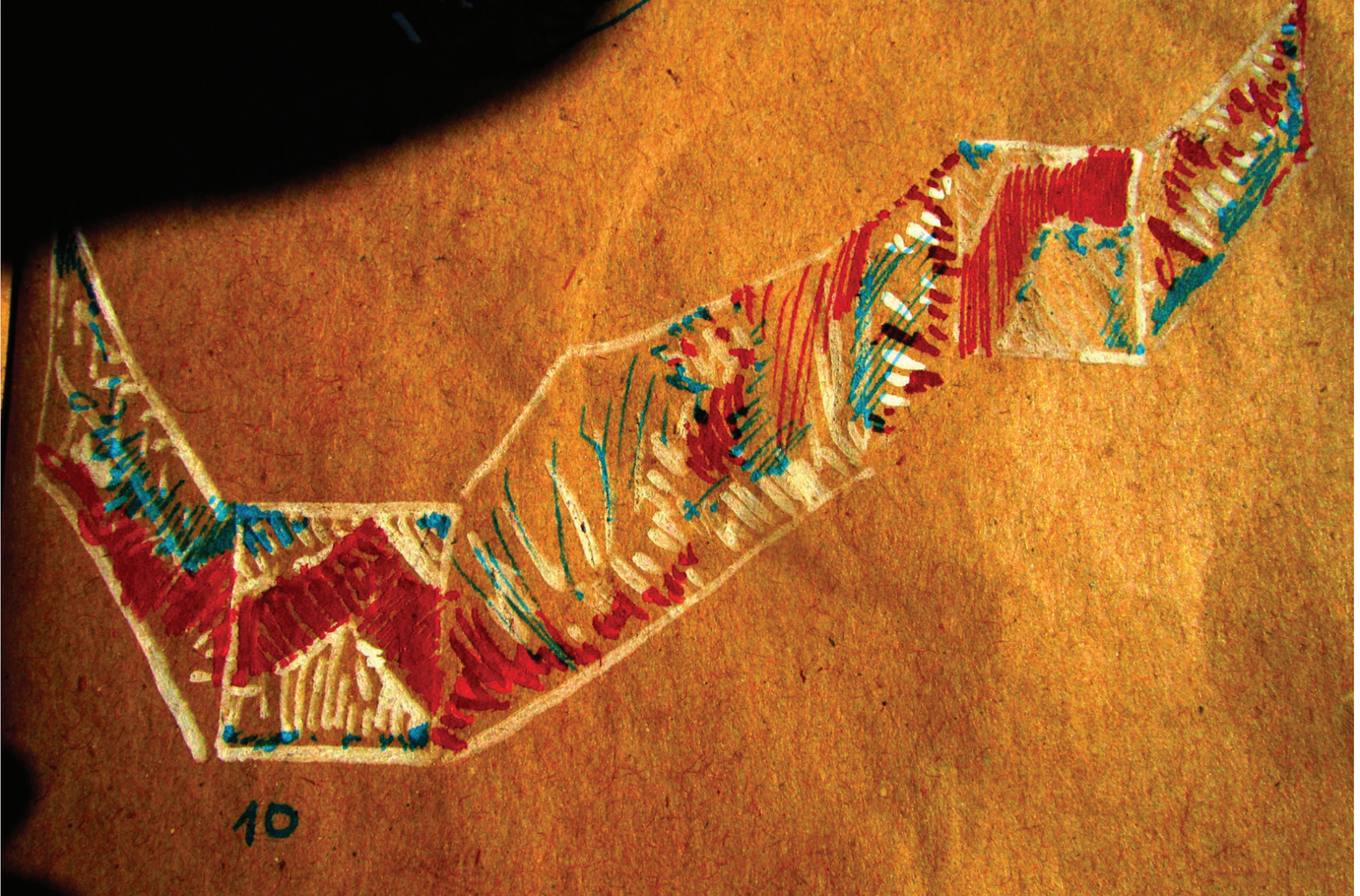
Planning stage: south façade (right front) and adjacent back yard spaces in 1:100 and 1:31,2.

Variation 7
Narrative: We sit in little boxes. We see what diamonds can ripe in such boxes. Diamonds ripen to become mere stones. Touching them before petrifying is our bliss, our only chance in life. Yes, there is a kind of blue wonder to the uniqueness and abrupt ending of life. We can afford the absence of any cult. We just engage in the most rational enterprise our age has in store for us. Let's pose for a group portrait. This moment might be memorable for all times to come. Just imagine how ages upon ages have evolved through spherical space and its curbs in higher dimensions. This whole process of massive transformation and chaotic rebuilding, destruction and synthesis has had a maybe banal but nonetheless essential result: us being here. So after all this seemingly cosmic enterprise of sphere shifting, the transformation of dimensions we cannot even know about and the 6th consecutive official celebration of the demise and subsequent revaluation to historic materialism: isn't this encounter a reason to hold on and stare idly, grasp the bliss of watching late autumn clouds, loose this one minute which years later we somehow come to understand it has been the most blissfull and happy of all moments we can possibly remember. It was just a walk. It was just a morning of erring and rushing. But this box of diamonds (almazy) has been the key to open to our understnaidng the intrinsic happiness of being alive and able to move. We would not do without such diamond boxes if we could.
Planning stage: south façade (right front) and adjacent back yard spaces in 1:100 ie. variation 7a and 1:31,2 - variation 7b.



8-10 Constructivist elements in three variations, framing the painting experience, scale 1:500.

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